

In Search of Shepherds - Everything You Think Is Wrong

REVIEW: This morning we shift gears a little bit in our series regarding eldership. We have talked over many things so far. And all of it has been chronological. We started with the first appearance of elders in the timeline of Scripture, about 45 AD. Since that time we have moved our way through the timeline looking at the elders first task mentioned - prayer for healing (45-47 AD). Then we watched over the next several years (47-63 AD) the development of the elders, how they were appointed in every church, how they had freedom to call them by different names (elder/overseer) how God continued to give more and more freedom to make judgments of what is best to the leaders in churches, and then we camped out for a long time on the character of an elder.

Finally, we finished up with a section on women and their role in ministry. We took on the difficult passages in Scripture, come to the conclusion (and you might differ with me on this) that women are welcome and needed in the church to exercise their gifts at every level in the church, except for eldership. Eldership is an extension of headship that we looked at way back when we discussed God's great design for humanity. As I always tell you, if you want to disagree with me, I'm okay with that. As long as your disagreement is based on Scripture. That is my foundation, and we have to operate from the same base or we will never come to a conclusion. None of this, "Well, Pastor Keith, I think your wrong, because I just don't think that would be something God would do." That is an opinion, not an argument based on the Bible. My next question for you will be "based on what?"

INTRO: Today, I will attempt to turn your understanding of the modern church paradigm on its head. For years the framework for most modern churches is this: We hire a Pastor to lead the church. He is the head of the church, under Christ, of course, but he is the big dog running the show. The boards and committees exist to help the Pastor carry out his vision for the church. We pay the Pastor because he is dedicating his life to serving God by serving the church in this way - and besides it is biblical.

I think that is an accurate picture of how most churches framework is set. The only problem is, that was never the biblical framework. In many ways, it sets the pastor up as the king of the church. I will tell you all up front, I don't want to be king! In the framework of eldership, the understanding of the board of elders is different than what I just described. The elders are equal with the primary teacher of the church. So it is a group of godly men, with tested and proven character that administer and shepherd the church together.

TRAN: So today we will look at a couple of different things that will help us understand this idea. - 1 Timothy 5:17-22

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- I. The elders role in the church
 - A. We have not talked much about what an elder does yet in this series, and we will still only talk around the issue today
 - B. However, these verses bring up two ideas about what an elder does
 1. It talks about elders directing well
 2. And it talks about elders preaching and teaching
 3. Now, this has led to some weak interpretations
 - C. Some people have said that this verse is teaching two different categories of elders - those that direct (or manage), and those that teach
 1. I think that interpreting these verses in that way is what we call isogeteical (or reading a foreign idea into the text)
 2. We are taking modern day ideas of administrators and of professional speakers/teachers and reading them back into the text
 - a) We will see this as we get further along in this study, but all elders are called to be able to teach (that was in the list of character qualities), and they are called to rule, manage, or direct
 - b) In fact, spoiler alert, I'm going to give you some of what an elder does right now - categories of functions that elders do
 - (1) So if you are afraid I will ruin the end of the book by letting the cat out of the bag now, you have my permission to leave for a couple minutes and come back later
 - (2) Every elder should be involved in
 - (a) Teaching biblical truth (Titus 1:9)
 - (b) Modeling Christ-like behavior (stemming from the character/maturity lists we studied)
 - (c) Maintaining doctrinal purity (Titus 1:9)
 - (d) Disciplining erring believers (members)
 - (e) Overseeing financial matters
 - (f) Praying for those that are sick
 - (3) This is what elders are called to do
 - (a) And while gifting may play a role in what areas of ministry the an elder concentrates in
 - (b) Every elder is still called to all of these things
 3. Problems occur when we try to divide elders into managing elders and teaching elders
 - a) What you can quickly wind up with is people that are so focused on the organizational side of things and making sure everything is functioning properly that they are disconnected and out of touch with the people they are trying to manage/lead

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- b) On the other hand, the teachers, in this scenario, can become so focused on instruction that they fail to shepherd in other ways
 - (1) They lose contact with the sheep
 - (2) They can quickly wind up in an ivory tower mentality, a further separation of the shepherds from the sheep
 - c) In both cases, when the duties of an elder are not balanced you wind up in the same place - elders that are called to shepherd and are out of touch with the sheep
 - (1) Allow me to say this as well, this can, and in many places is happening under our current system
 - (2) People get placed on boards, and can become so bogged down in meetings, or in making decisions (especially if they see that is their “ministry”) that they have less time for direct ministry with people
 - (a) They become out of touch with people
 - (b) And leadership becomes more difficult because they don’t know how to lead the people they are supposed to be in touch with
 - d) So to be clear and fair in building a case for eldership, after telling you this about our current form of government, does this mean that eldership is superior to our current form of government
 - (1) Answer: No. Not based on this alone
 - (2) Eldership is prone to similar problems
 - (a) In fact, I will take this one step further
 - (b) Eldership can have just as many problems as any other form of church government - reason: you are still dealing with sinful humans
 - (c) Let me say it again, that is why character is vital
 - (3) I do think eldership is superior for a number of reasons, but it is good to point out weaknesses as we go because we need to know potential pitfalls as well as the benefits
- II. So, if Paul is not creating two categories of elders, what is he doing?
- A. Thanks for asking - he is saying that any elder that is spending a lot of time carrying out his duties and doing them well should be cared for financially
 - 1. That is the whole idea of “double honor”
 - 2. Some say Paul did not mean money by the use of “double honor”
 - a) If that is true, then explain to me why Paul talks about not muzzling the ox
 - b) And the worker is deserving of his wage - as examples of what he is talking about

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- c) I suppose that means I have just been compared to an ox - not sure if I should be complimented or insulted
- 3. The idea of “double honor” is a means of esteeming and honoring faithful service
- B. One of the things I was referring to with the title of the message has to do with this
 - 1. In our modern system, we pay a pastor to come and shepherd the flock of God
 - a) Paying him (in this case me) is correct and biblical
 - b) However, the biblical model is godly men from within a church are the elders
 - (1) If one or more of them really put lots of time and effort into their duties as an elder, Paul is making provision for them
 - c) So where we have this wrong is that in creating an office of Pastor at all
 - (1) A pastor of a church is simply an elder that has dedicated himself to his work as an elder
 - (2) You will never find the office of Pastor in the pages of Scripture - pastor is a spiritual gift
 - 2. So in our modern system, we have things rather backwards
 - a) We search for a pastor to lead, and then look for godly leaders to aid
 - b) Instead, the model is we have godly leaders, and then provide for one that is dedicating their life to God’s work in their church
- C. In case anyone is in any way unclear on what Paul is driving at, turn to 1 Corinthians 9:14 (p. 1148)
 - 1. “In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.”
- D. There do need to be words of caution regarding paying an elder that is doing well
 - 1. While they should be provided for and “make their living from the gospel” the Bible also says that elders should not be “a lover of money”
 - a) We talked about how an elder should be generous with how God has blessed him
 - b) Money should not be the reason he is serving the church - Christ should always be the reason
 - (1) I have always said, if I was independently wealthy, I would not stop doing what I am doing
 - (2) I wish money were not a consideration for this job
 - 2. The second word of caution is a sermon to me, so you all can go to sleep for a moment of you like

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- a) It means being above reproach in how I spend my time
 - b) I am receiving “double honor” so I better act like it, I better work like it, I better understand that part of the reason I am receiving “double honor” is because I am directing well and preaching and teaching
- III. Next in 1 Timothy 5, we have both protection for and discipline of elders
- A. Paul wanted set up protection for elders starting in verse 19
- 1. Paul reaches back to the OT to pull forward the principle of two or three witnesses
 - a) The intent here was to protect elders from false accusations
 - b) In the OT it was designed the same way - not just for leaders, but for everyone - here Paul is simply applying it to elders
 - 2. Hear me well on this, Paul is NOT saying that if there is only one witness an elder cannot be accused
 - a) Let me pull out some more OT for you, give you an explanation, and then give you the contemporary significance of this
 - (1) Turn to Deuteronomy 19:15-19 (p. 195)
 - (2) Moses, after saying two or three witness then says if there is only one witness, they are to stand before the Lord and the judges are to make a THOROUGH investigation
 - (3) The same would hold true for an elder
 - (a) If it comes down to a he said she said scenario, the situation is to be thoroughly investigated
 - (b) You don't just drop it saying “there was only one witness - not good enough”
 - b) Why this is so important is because churches have used this to cover up sin
 - (1) I have heard of churches where the elders have done almost exactly this - it was he said she said so they basically ignored the accusation
 - (2) There was a church near where I grew up that two of the leaders that took a handicapped girl on the bus for church raped her, and covered for each other
 - (a) Praise God they were found out
 - (3) And I say it again, this is why mature character is so important in who becomes an elder
 - (a) We are all still sinful humans
 - (b) And the checks and balances have to be put in place
 - c) One of the things this shows us here about elders is that they are not despots
 - (1) They do not rule with an iron fist

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- (2) They need to have checks and balances like any other person, like any other system
 - (a) The saying “absolute power corrupts absolutely” is true
 - (b) And elders should not and do not have absolute power in the sense that they cannot do something wrong or that accusations should not be investigated
- 3. Let’s make sure we are clear on this though
 - a) Paul is setting out a way to protect elders
 - (1) Elders should not just have accusations thrown about
 - (2) There should be witnesses to an event or an accusation
 - (a) So for example, if someone accused me of preaching heresy, there better be more than one of you that heard that, and can prove that out in some way
 - (b) If the witness says, “Last Sunday, right here in church, Pastor Keith was preaching heresy”
 - i) One of two things is true, either there is only one person in church capable of catching the heresy (which better not be true)
 - ii) Everyone else fell asleep
 - iii) Or, this person is obviously diluted
 - b) This is what Paul is trying to do - set up a system of checks and balances, so that some accusations fall to the wayside simply because there is no evidence to sustain them
- B. Next Paul moves on to talk about discipline of erring elders
 - 1. Which, the very fact that Paul talks about this topic at all indicates that elders can err
 - a) We have mentioned this before, but let’s state it outright, just because an elder meets the maturity list requirements does not mean that he is incapable of sin
 - b) However, if he is as mature as the list would suggest, when confronted with his behavior, he should either recognize he was wrong and take steps to correct, or (and this is usually Christian liberty issues) take time to pray, and meditate on his behavior, asking other godly people to help him see the truth of the situation
 - 2. The problem comes in when an elder has been seduced by sin for so long, that he begins to try to hide how he is living
 - a) Sooner or later he will be found out (Numbers 32:23)
 - b) How he reacts in those moments is critical

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- (1) If he responds with an attitude and behavior that says, “Yes, I am wrong. I have let this area of life go, and it has been killing me on the inside. To be honest I am glad you know.”
 - (a) Now you have a person that is capable of being restored
 - (b) They acknowledge their sin, and are willing to submit themselves for help
- (2) If, however, the man responds by denying things, lying, covering up, placing blame, etc. you have a bigger problem on your hands
 - (a) You now have a man that you must deal with in some manner
 - (b) To try to tell you how to deal with this type of person is close to impossible because every situation is different - but that this person needs to be dealt with is a certainty
- c) Paul does give us one other certainty that is a generality as well
 - (1) Paul says, “But those elders who are sinning you are to reprove before everyone, so that the others may take warning.”
 - (2) So the certainty is that they must be dealt with, and in a public manner of some form
 - (3) The generality, or if I may say, the freedom comes in with how they are dealt with
 - (a) Can we agree that not every sin has the same level of consequence?
 - (b) So for example, you have an elder that has been neglecting his familia duties - his wife is feeling unsupported, his kids wonder more often than not, “why isn’t daddy here”
 - i) This man’s wife talks with one of the other elder’s wives and shares her pain over this
 - ii) The elder’s wife talks with her husband that goes to the erring elder to help him correct what is going wrong
 - (c) So here is my question: Does that elder need to be reprovved in front of the whole church?
 - i) Based on Matthew 18, if the erring elder understands the problem and corrects, I would say unequivocally “no”
 - ii) If there are repeated attempts to correct this brother, and he has no intention of being corrected, might it have to be brought to the whole church - perhaps
 - (1) All the details may not have to be shared
 - (2) But the church may need to know that this brother was struggling, has been reached out to multiple times, and refuses to repent, so he is stepping down from the elder board

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- (4) Let me point something out: do you see why the task of being an elder can be some difficult?
 - (a) An elder's goal is spiritual health and vitality for his family and for the church family
 - (b) To achieve that, you often have to walk through difficult circumstances, and mirky waters to get to spiritual health
 - (c) It is not a job for the faint of heart
 - (5) Do you also see how, if handled improperly, discipline for elders, or even for church members can quickly turn into a witch hunt?
 - (a) We do not bring someone before the church for every little charge
 - (b) For obstinance in the face of repeated attempts at correction, or heinous and/or public sins - discipline should be public
 - i) And the reason is given to us by Paul
 - ii) "So that others may take warning"
 - (1) That "others" may simply be the other elders - in cases not warranting church wide discipline
 - (2) Then again it may be for the whole church
 - (3) But the point is to help people understand that we deal with sin in a serious manner because we take holiness seriously
- C. Then Paul encourages Timothy that these instructions be carried out without partiality or favoritism
- 1. In other words, no looking the other way on someone's sin
 - 2. No "good ol' boys club" where "the elders have each other's backs"
 - a) If an elder truly has the back of a fellow elder, his concern will not be whether or not his friend gets caught
 - b) His concern will be for his spiritual health and holiness before God Almighty
 - 3. I read this somewhere around the time of preparing this message, I can't remember where, but I find this to be very true:
 - a) Too often Christians can become see concerned with being gracious to someone
 - b) That we short circuit God's plans for repentance and correction by not allowing someone to feel the consequences of their actions
 - (1) When we try to remove the consequences of someone's actions, the chance that they truly learn a lesson is diminished
 - (2) There are times when we need to allow someone to feel the weight of their sin - it drives them toward genuine repentance

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- (a) And to be clear, I am not saying we need to be judge and heap on extra consequences
 - (b) They haven't suffered enough so I will help the process
 - (c) That is not our job - ours is to be gracious where possible, and allow them to feel the consequences for their actions
- D. Finally, Paul adds "Do not be hasty in laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure."
- 1. This comes within the context of these instructions on elders
 - 2. So it seems that Paul is telling Timothy not to be too hasty to restore an erring elder
 - a) It is one thing to forgive
 - b) Rebuilding trust is another
 - (1) It involves building a long track record - particularly in the area you failed in
 - (2) For example: If you have been lying, it takes a long time, and a positive track record that your word is as solid as a rock to rebuild trust
 - 3. People can be sorry when they are caught in sin
 - a) It is only time that will tell if it was because they got busted
 - b) Or because they were truly broken for their sin before God
 - 4. Paul's statement about sharing in the sins of others seems to go with the idea of not covering things up, or being "overly gracious"
 - 5. Paul wanted Timothy to remain pure in his dealings with erring elders, and for that matter erring brothers and sisters in Christ

CONCLUSION: I hope that this helps us to better understand the original establishment of eldership. It is a group of godly men, chosen from among the church that lead the church, for its own spiritual health and vitality. When men commit so much of their time, Paul encourages financial honor. At the same time, Paul knows that elders are still human, and can still sin. So he seeks to protect them from false accusations, and still provide a way to deal with an erring elder.